

## Chapter 3

# Corridor Planning Principles

### OVERVIEW

**T**HE CORRIDOR PLANNING PRINCIPLES presented in this chapter are statements of intent that describe how the physical environment in the Rockville Pike corridor should be treated in the future. A set of draft principles for the *Rockville Pike Plan* came directly out of the extensive public input that was generated at the kick-off meeting in December 2007 and the stakeholder workshop in February 2008. These principles were used to guide the work of the City during the Community Design Charrette (May 31 - June 3, 2008), and contributed directly to the development of the *Draft for Planning Commission*

*Public Hearing* which was released on December 29, 2010.

The draft principles were amended during work sessions with the Planning Commission and the Mayor and Council and are organized under three headings:

- A. Livable, desirable environment enhanced by thoughtful urban design
- B. Multimodal transportation, and
- C. Economic viability.

This chapter lists each principle, along with a short description to help understand the intent.

# CORRIDOR PLANNING PRINCIPLES

## A. LIVEABLE, DESIRABLE ENVIRONMENT ENHANCED BY THOUGHTFUL URBAN DESIGN

### 1. *Attractive and inviting community design and development*

The Pike will have a coherent relationship among the buildings, transportation infrastructure, and open spaces, in a manner that creates an attractive and inviting community. This approach places a greater emphasis on building form rather than use, brings buildings closer to the street, encourages façade improvements, reduces the prominence of surface parking, and emphasizes green areas and public gathering spaces, among other strategies. The plan recommends defining the character of the public realm through development regulations and design guidance that will create more consistent development patterns and greatly improve the appearance of the Pike, while allowing for architectural diversity and visual interest.

### 2. *Mixed uses and mixed-income new neighborhoods*

Mixed-use development will contribute to the desirability and vitality of the Pike by placing residences, employment and services in proximity to each other, enabling less reliance on motor vehicles, and a greater sense of community. The plan supports creation of great new mixed-income neighborhoods within the Plan Area through focus on planning and design of the public realm to enable public culture and distinct neighborhood character. Areas that are closest to the Twinbrook Metro Station are most appropriate for intensive mixed-use development.

### 3. *Inviting conditions for walking and biking*

Providing an environment that is safe, pleasant and convenient for pedestrians and cyclists will make it more likely that the travel mode share in the corridor will shift away from automobiles in the future. The plan recommends a series of changes to meet this principle, including a finer street grid, smaller blocks, wider sidewalks in more protected locations, and travel lanes or paths for bicycles. Street trees, landscaping, underground utilities, and visually appealing building façades will also enhance the environment for pedestrians and cyclists.

### 4. *Appealing parks and public open spaces for community gathering and activity*

Today's Pike, with its extensive surface parking lots and high speed traffic, may not seem conducive for public gathering spaces and outdoor activity. However, such community amenities are envisioned as important components of the corridor in the future. Public input supported the creation of a pleasant public realm that will invite outdoor activity and community interaction, including open space such as plazas and squares, public spaces that integrate flowers, fountains, and public art; civic areas that support community activities and City-owned parks that can provide active and passive functions.

## 5. *Environmentally friendly and sustainable*

The planning process revealed a strong community desire for an environmentally friendly corridor. This principle will be met by providing more parks and open space, planting more trees, improving landscaping, reducing impervious surfaces, and supporting green building, among other initiatives. The plan encourages building designs that can be adapted to changing uses over time and, where appropriate, the reuse and adaptation of existing buildings. More broadly, a development approach that mixes uses, especially near transit, encourages a shift away from reliance on the automobile and will have a beneficial impact on air quality and the level of carbon emissions, compared to development not in a mixed-use context.

## 6. *An urbanizing corridor, distinct from Rockville's suburban development*

Rockville will assert its land use authority in the corridor, while continuing to coordinate with other jurisdictions to ensure functionality and compatibility. Portions of the Plan Area will be distinguished from the more suburban development patterns of Rockville as well, by having regulatory standards that are customized to those urbanizing areas. In addition, attractive and adequate signage, and lighting and landscaping elements, will improve the appearance of the Pike, establish a distinctive character for the corridor, promote an appreciation of the Pike's role in Rockville's history, as well as maintain and enhance its economic success.

## 7. *Development that is supported by commensurate growth of infrastructure and services*

The development of the Pike must be in balance with commensurate growth in such key infrastructure and service areas as school capacity, fire and police protection, traffic management, transit infrastructure, and utilities such as water, sewer and power, which all add to costs. Maintaining this balance is a challenging proposition both practically and legislatively due to factors that are beyond the City's control. Examples include development outside of Rockville, new births, in-migration, changes in household composition, and other trends that lead to population growth and demographic change. The City looks forward to continuing our partnership with Montgomery County, other government entities, and the residents and businesses of Rockville to address these important quality-of-life topics.

# B. MULTIMODAL TRANSPORTATION

## 1. *Access and movement choices for all travel modes that provide connections within the corridor and with surrounding areas*

Many stakeholders cited the need to better connect Rockville Pike in terms of adjacent shopping centers and surrounding neighborhoods and streets. The current configuration of the street network features incomplete service roads and multiple driveway entrances, which tend to force much of the local traffic onto Rockville Pike – even for very short trips between nearby shopping centers. This plan seeks to formalize the Pike's service roads and expand the street network to enhance connectivity throughout the corridor for both cars and pedestrians. It also

recommends improving pedestrian and bicycle connections between the Pike and its surrounding neighborhoods, which will reduce the need to use a car for every local errand.

## **2. *Safe and accessible pedestrian and biking infrastructure and experience***

Stakeholder recommendations included sidewalk enhancements, bicycle lanes or paths, signal timings that allow pedestrians to cross the Pike comfortably, improved accessibility to shops and surrounding neighborhoods, and the reconfiguration of buildings and parking lots to enhance the pedestrian environment, among others. Whereas the Pike today prioritizes the private automobile over all other modes of transportation, the Pike corridor envisioned in this plan safely supports multiple modes of transportation – including walking, biking, and public transit – and infrastructure to assist seniors and people with mobility impairments or other disabilities.

## **3. *Efficient and reliable local and regional public transportation options***

The mixed-use and multi-modal approach supported in this plan relies on availability of efficient, safe and reliable transit. The corridor's proximity to Metro-rail's Red Line and the location of the Twinbrook Metro Station is an enormous asset to the plan area. In addition, the potential for a county-wide Bus Rapid Transit system will have significant implications for this Plan Area, as Rockville Pike is one of the routes contemplated by Montgomery County.

## **4. *Smooth and safe vehicular flow***

Traffic congestion and the need for improved traffic safety are significant concerns for people who travel along the Pike. It is a goal of the City, in its design of roadways and implementation of this plan, to work toward eliminating traffic fatalities and serious injuries as expressed by Vision Zero.<sup>1</sup> Participants in the planning process provided numerous suggestions for addressing traffic concerns including street pavement repairs, improved signal timing, redesign of intersections, and improving access to and from shopping centers. The boulevard concept, which separates fast-moving traffic from slow-moving traffic and reduces the number of curb cuts off of the main thoroughfare, street network enhancements, and intersection improvements recommended in this plan conform to this principle of smoother and safer vehicular flow.

## **5. *Easy-to-navigate environment***

Stakeholders indicated they would like to see wayfinding improvements that will maintain and enhance the economic success of the Pike. They want to see better signage and lighting that will make the Pike more welcoming and navigable

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<sup>1</sup> Vision Zero is a collaborative international movement to eliminate traffic fatalities and serious injuries through a series of practices that put the safety and health of human beings as the primary interest of a road network.

for residents and visitors alike. The plan incorporates these recommendations and also provides for a boulevard and expanded road network that will break up some of the largest blocks and create a more coherent system for maneuvering along the Pike. Structured parking and an attractive pedestrian environment will also enable shoppers to “park once” and comfortably reach nearby shops on foot. Elements such as maps, consolidated signage, and informational boards can be integrated into new developments to further facilitate wayfinding along the Pike.

## C. ECONOMIC VIABILITY

### 1. *Retention and attraction of a diverse retail community*

Retail is central to the economic success of Rockville as a whole and the Pike’s neighborhoods. Throughout the planning process, residents and other stakeholders identified the Pike’s commercial and retail success as an element that should continue to be supported. The plan strongly encourages small, large, locally-owned and national chain retail, all of which draw shoppers from Rockville and throughout the region, and contribute to the commercial character of the Pike. Residents and other stakeholders expressed that they would like to see the shops and restaurants that they patronize remain in the corridor as shopping centers age and redevelopment opportunities arise. Additional support from the City, or Rockville Economic Development, Inc. (REDI) may be needed in some cases to help fulfill this principle.

### 2. *City support for successful development*

The City’s infrastructure and regulatory environment should support development and businesses so that they have ample opportunity to thrive economically. The highest density in the Plan Area should be the area closest to the Twinbrook Metro Station. Concentrating development near transit and other existing infrastructure has environmental and economic benefits. It helps to reduce automobile dependence, congestion and pollution and results in a more efficient provision of public services. Successful redevelopment will support and increase Rockville’s tax base, and bring new vitality and energy to this already urbanizing area.

### 3. *Financeable infrastructure and fiscally responsible implementation*

The public consistently communicated that the plan must be realistic and achievable. Infrastructure and other required investments must be realistically financeable and supported by anticipated development. In order to achieve the plan goals, significant funding from City, County, State and Federal entities must be secured.